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EPS 599

Ethnography of the University Initiative

Examining the Third Space in the Context of University Housing

## Introduction

“At home at Illinois” is printed at the bottom of every page on the University of Illinois’ housing website and it is due to the sense of community beyond a living space that makes university housing an outstanding lens to view identity formation and interaction. Students who attend this university and live within housing are presented with an extraordinary opportunity to experience a multitude of cultures and social identities. The presence of social distinctions such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, and all of the intersections of each, are present within residence housing. Students are placed in a fantastic position to explore and discuss the challenges and constructs of identity without leaving their halls.

By imposing the rule that all freshman students must live in university housing, the university has created an exceptional place to study the dynamics of social identity in relation to social space. There are very few places in the U.S. where people are somewhat forced to live in an integrated environment. Although locations exist where the general population is demographically homogenous, there are comparable locations where roommates are randomly placed that allow for the working class Asian student to be placed with a middle class Latino. It is for this reason that the residence halls are considered optimal places to provide an exceptional and transformational experience; students living here are in a critical position to formulate Third Spaces.

The Third space is defined as, “the encounter of two distinct and unequal social groups in a location where culture is disseminated and displaced from interacting groups... whereby these two groups conceive themselves to partake in a common identity relating to a shared space and common dialogue”<sup>2</sup>. At the onset of this project, I was certain that the concept of a Third Space was applicable to the context of the university via the Department of Residential Life through university housing. Although Bhabha’s primary focus is on the Third Space as it relates to post-

colonialism, I believe that the basic principles can be made applicable to the modern university housing setting. Often referred to in terms of ambivalence, the principle concept of a Third Space focuses on the enunciation of difference, the interrogation of identity and culture, and the transformation that produces a new entity.

There are few places where people are forced to live in integrated housing. It has been suggested that the military provides a living similar situation but not the same living experience.<sup>4</sup> The university residence hall is different in that an individual is *presented* with the option to explore his/her social identities as well as the identities of others. For some, the curiosity urges them to tackle hot topics such as affirmative action and how it corresponds to race and gender. Yet others choose to live in a state devoid of an interaction that would challenge them to confront societal disparities. Housing provides an ideal situation for Third Spaces to be formed considering that many students arrive to the university in a place of uncertainty in regard to their identity yet filled with urge to explore. If Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity were to be found, it would arguably be here, at the university level, right underneath the eye of Residential Life. According to the Bhabha, "the social articulation of difference...is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation"<sup>1</sup>. As the U.S. has just elected its first Black President, it is probable that such a transformation is happening right now.

In this paper, I will explore the concept of Third Spaces and demonstrate how it is applicable to the university housing structure through social justice programming. By examining the attitudes held by Resident Advisors, Multicultural Advocates, and residents, I will reveal why social justice programming is important, how it is implemented, and unveil the ways to decrease resistance. I will discuss why it is imperative for Residential Life to equip students with the

multicultural competence (through social justice programming) necessary to negotiate an increasingly globalized world, as well as connect how facilitating Third Spaces can allow them to truly make everyone feel “at home at Illinois”.

## **Third Spaces-Theory and Practice**

The fundamental processes that occur within the Third Space include the enunciation of difference, the interrogation of identity, and the transformation that produces a new entity.

The first feature of the Third Space is the enunciation of difference. Bhabha describes this attribute as the one, “which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew”<sup>1</sup>. It is presence of the Other and its respective culture in a manner not previously predicted by the person holding a majority status. Stated differently, “the enunciative process introduces a split in the performative present of cultural identification; a split between the demand...for a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of that certitude...as a practice of domination or resistance”<sup>1</sup>. Considering stereotypes may contextualize this process. If a person from a privileged background encounters the Other and he or she does not fit into their stable system of reference or stereotype of what that culture is or does, that reference falters. For the oppressor (or member of a privileged group) an interrogation takes place. He asks himself “why doesn’t this person fit, what makes her different, is this schema no longer valid”? For the oppressed, a resistant nature may emerge in the form of the need to educate, the unwillingness to educate, or the introspection of what aspect of their identity initiated this process in the first place. The enunciative process necessarily leads to the interrogation of

identity.

This second process of Third Spaces, interrogation of identity, takes place when confronted with the Other and the preferred point of reference has proved itself to be ineffective. Bhabha asserts, “Identification, as it is spoken in the *desire of the Other*, is always a question of interpretation, for it is the elusive assignation of myself with a one-self, the elision of person and place”<sup>1</sup>. One is forced to question existing classifications and where ‘one-self’ exist within those realms. This is an area where there is large body of research that concurs with Bhabha’s. Stuart Hall recognizes the importance of ambivalence and splitting as indicated in the process of enunciation. He cosigns the notion that an inquiry into identity takes place when confronted with the Other stating, “ this is the Other that one can only know from the place from which one stands...this is the self as inscribed in the gaze of the Other and this notion breaks down the boundaries between those who belong and those who do not...between those whose histories have been written and those whose histories they have depended on but whose histories cannot be spoken”.<sup>5</sup> The Other is necessary for one to solidify a self-image. Without the inward examination of the elements that construct one’s identity and culture, it is difficult to know with certainty who you really are and your place in the world.

The final element of the Third Space is the product that emerges from the two prior processes: transformation and the birth of a hybrid. The cultural hybrid emerges from the Third Space due to the acknowledgement that neither identity nor culture is singular or fixed. The hybrid is only produced after the oppressor seeks to place the Other within a framework and fails, which produces something, “familiar but new”. Paul Meredith expounds upon this model stating, “Hybridity emerges from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and colonized challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity”.<sup>6</sup> Within the context of housing,

Multicultural Advocates function as hybrids.

Multicultural Advocates are the, “celebrated and privileged...a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference”<sup>6</sup>. I maintain that members from both privileged and disadvantaged groups may become cultural hybrids, straddling the two cultures of the university as traditional students as well as ‘committed intellectuals’. Committed intellectuals are people whose responsibility it is to intervene in particular struggles by changing the object of knowledge and reformulating the concept of society.<sup>7</sup>

For the Multicultural Advocate (or MA), it is not enough to be a community within housing that has study groups or social nights; for the MA, the community is the conduit for the increased multicultural competence of individuals. “Community disturbs the grand globalizing narrative...displaces the emphasis on production in ‘class collectivity’, and disrupts the homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation”<sup>1</sup>. University housing creates a community separate from society that allows students to have a unique experience without much interference. By creating this community outside of society, the impact of societies biases and learned prejudice can be critically examined.

In a university that is predominantly White and stresses inclusively, yet still has racially themed parties and acts of vandalism at cultural centers, it is essential to deposit cultural relativism within the student body. The housing structure can do this during that mandatory year where students are forced to live within its borders. I contend that housing serves as the site where the Other is encountered, social justice programs serve as the place where interrogation of identity takes place, and Multicultural Advocates function as cultural hybrids, facilitating the transformation of a culturally incompetent resident.

Third Spaces should easily be found within a university housing structure, especially from one that lists inclusiveness as one of its values<sup>3</sup>. “The very question of identity only emerges *in-between* disavowal and designation”.<sup>1</sup> This *in-between* space is university housing. By randomly grouping students from a variety of backgrounds ranging from suburbs to urban areas to international locales, poor to upper middle class, university housing serves as a leveler to some extent. While the privileges of being middle class may surface via materialistic cues, the very space in which this identity is being expressed is neither in a middle class neighborhood, nor an inner city neighborhood but in a space that has yet to be molded. Students are confronted with the identities of ‘Others’: hall mates, floor mates, and roommates, somewhat forcing them to question and solidify their own identities.

Third Spaces are birthed from these *in-between* spaces and according to Bhabha, “it is in the emergence of the interstices-the overlap and displacement domains of difference-that the intersubjective and collective experiences of...community interest, or cultural value are negotiated”. The obstacle however, is the manner in which these spaces are created and the tools that are provided to students to recreate these spaces themselves. Social justice programs are an ideal location to find students learning, exploring, and negotiating identity. Yet the frequencies of these programs, as well as the level of attendance, are areas of concern for the Department of Residential Life. Multicultural Advocates are charged with the duty to educate residents within the halls, as well as serve as a resource when conflicts or inquiries surrounding social identity arise. Yet as interviews revealed, Multicultural Advocates, also referred to as MAs, sometimes feel unsupported by Resident Advisors and go under utilized. While Resident Advisors, also referred to as RAs, are also expected to be advocates of social justice, survey data reveals that programming surrounding issues of identity are infrequent at best and totally absent at worse. Many RAs

indicated that when they do the requested social justice program, it is often passive, in the form of bulletin boards, which can easily and are often destroyed. It is for this reason that members of housing are not facilitating the construction of Third Spaces to their full potential. Based on the data gathered through surveys and interviews of MAs, RAs, and residents, this essay reveals the explanation behind laissez-faire attitudes toward social justice programming as well as develop recommendations for ways to increase attendance.

## **Methodology**

As stated in the previous section, residence halls serve as the place where an intensive encounter with the Other takes place (intensive considering that it occurs daily). I hypothesized that social justice programs facilitate the interrogation of identity that takes place due to this encounter. It is not my intention to argue that social justice programs are the *only* location where the interrogation of identity takes place, but for the purposes of this study, a realistic place to begin considering they are open to all residents and occur at a predictable time and location.

Using this premise, I created a survey that consisted of ten questions inquiring into the frequency of social justice programs, also referred to as diversity programs. The definition of social identity was provided as ‘anything relating to socioeconomic status, race, gender, ability, sexuality or an intersection of each’. There were two versions of the survey asking the same questions with an exception of two. One question, which referred to the effectiveness of the EOL dialogue course, was eliminated because it did not correlate to the issue of Third Spaces. The second question “What are the most frequently used gathering places on your floor”, was rephrased to include all locations within the residence hall and was restated as “ In what spaces within the hall are people most likely to interact across racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and SES



identities”. Rephrasing this question also allows me to distinguish between people just *being* in one a listed location versus *interacting* within that given space. The original survey was administered to one staff of 12 people; the majority of participants received the amended survey.

The survey was administered to 47 paraprofessional staff members including RAs, MAs, and RDs (resident directors); two staffs from each region were surveyed. In region A, there were two RDs, two MAs, and eighteen RAs surveyed. In region B, there were two RDs, one MA, and twenty-two RAs surveyed. There was a Region C, but due to conflicts with scheduling, staff from this area was unable to be surveyed. The survey questions were as follows:

1. How long have you been a RA/Ma?
2. \*What are the most frequently used gathering places on your floor?

Rephrased to: in what spaces are people most likely to interact across racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and SES identities?

3. How culturally diverse are the people visiting this place(s) on a scale from 1-5 with 5 being very diverse and 1 being not at all.
4. What was the subject of your most successful program regarding diversity? How many people attended?
5. How often do your programs address issues of identity (i.e. race, class, sexuality, gender etc)?
6. How would you identify yourself?
7. Do you feel as though your identity is celebrated within housing? How? If no, why not?
8. \*How effective was the EOL 199 course in preparing you for issues regarding identity? Rate it on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being very effective?
9. Are there many unplanned events/ discussions that take place on your floor? Where?
10. How often do you collaborate with your Multicultural Advocate? How many programs have you done together?

The staffs were given the opportunity to list the identities that were most salient for them and

the social identities listed ranged across racial, class, gender, and sexual categories. The identities listed were as follows: White, black, Biracial, Bisexual, straight, middles class, working class, "religious", Christian, Indian, Asian American, and Ally. The participants were also asked to identify any possible locations where students gather to talk and the following locations were listed: hallways were the overwhelming majority, resident's rooms, RAs rooms, bathrooms, dining halls, and main/floor lounges. While there was difference in the number of identities listed between the two locations of residence halls, the most noteworthy ones occurred when the staff was asked to label the degree of diversity between individuals that frequented the previously listed places.

How culturally diverse from 1-5 (5 being very diverse and 1 not diverse at all)

Region A	Region B
Ranked 1-18%	Ranked 1-0%
Ranked 2- 40%	Ranked 2-20%
Ranked 3-22%	Ranked 3-20%
Ranked 4-13%	Ranked 4-32%
Ranked 5->1%	Ranked 5-28%

Frequency of programs addressing identity per semester RD and MA responses not included

Region A	Region B
0-1: 16%	0-1: 27%
2: 22%	2: 18%
3-4: 16%	3-4: 13%
5 or more: >1%	5 or more: 0
No response: 0	No response: >1%
“Not often”: 38%	“Not often”: 36%

Frequency of Collaboration with MA per semester RD and MA responses not included

Region A	Region B
0-1: 50%	0-1: 59%
2: 1%	2: >1%
3-4: 0%	3-4: >1%
5 or more: >0%	5 or more: >1%

No response: >1%	No response: >1%
“Not often”: 1%	“Not often”: 1%

A second survey was administered in the residence hall during a specialty dinner that took place in Region A. This dinner is held weekly and students from all 3 regions usually visit it. The survey was used to determine whether residents knew what an MA was, document how often they attend social justice programs, and selected among a list three elements that they believed were required in order for them to attend a social justice program. The list from which they chose was developed by a group of 18 students in a course on campus. This group, while discussing multicultural competence in leadership, developed a list of essential elements to create a successful social justice educational program. They decided that a successful program must dispel stereotypes, have multiple sessions, have a credible presenter, be comprehensible, be cohesive, voluntary, discussion based, diverse presenter and attendees, be connected to something else such as professional development, have activities and resources for the participants, have snacks, and use multiple forms of media for the presentation. For the purposes of the survey, I listed all of these elements except, be comprehensible, and cohesiveness as not to have participants need further explanation. The element snacks were not included because they are usually provided by hosts of the programs. A total of 59 residents were surveyed, 39 from Region A, 11 from Region B, 5 from Region C, and 4 participants did not indicate where they lived. Only students who lived within the residence halls were surveyed and the survey itself was multiple choice. The questions asked on the survey were as follows:

1.who is your MA and what do they do?

A-What's an MA

← B -(list name of MA)

← C- (list name of MA) I don't know what they do

←

← 2. Of the following programs, which are you more likely to attend?

← A- a social identity program hosted by an RA

← B-A social identity program hosted by an MA

← C –a campus program with a guest speaker talking about social identities

← D-none of the above

←

← 3-which of the following do you feel is req. for you to attend a program on social identity?

Circle three: -\* not all students selected three options

← Dispel stereotypes

← Multiple sessions

← Credible presenter

← Voluntary

← Discussion based

← Related to something else

← Diverse presenter and attendees:

← Activities/resources for participants

← Multiple forms of media

←

← 4-I attend programs that talk about social identities:

← 0-1 per semester

← 2-3 per semester

← 4 or more semester

← Never

← Never in residence hall

←

Table 1 represents the break down of responses received to Resident Survey

Table 1

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3 (selected up to 3)	Question 4 (semester)
30% chose A	25% chose A	Credible presenter 30	1: 66%
42% chose B	>1% chose B	Voluntary 29	2-3: 10%
18% chose C	37% chose C	Activities and resources 28	4 or more: >1%
	30% chose D	Diverse Presenter 18	Never: 16%
		Multiple forms of media 13	Never in res hall: >1%
		Discussion based 10	
		Dispel stereotypes 8	
		Related to something else 7	

## Discussion

As a former MA, it was interesting to note just how little had changed within the three semesters since I had worked in the residence halls. Despite some minor reconstruction in both regions, the halls seemed the same. There was a large visual appearance of diversity in Region B and a lack of that visual representation in Region A. I used my position as a former MA to build a repertoire with the participants, commenting on how long it had been since I attended a staff development meeting. Staff in Region A seemed curious and interested in the study and while I was explaining the purpose of my research, asked questions and seemed attentive. I faced resistance immediately when I surveyed one staff in Region B. While the staff from the Living Learning Community (LLC) appeared disinterested but willing to participate, the member of the other staff verbally expressed unease. The RD introduced who I was and as I began to describe my study I was cut off, with one person saying “This is the guest speaker?” I ignored the comment and continued describing my study, emphasizing more than usual its voluntary nature.

Despite the disruption, all members of the staff agreed to participate. The one staff member, once receiving his informed consent form, proceeded to ask me question such as, “who authorized you to conduct this study, why does housing need this, are you getting paid”. Somewhat disrespectful, his tone indicated clear annoyance and what I would classify as resistance to the topic in general. I calmly told him that I was part of a program called Ethnography of the University and that my study was being supervised by a faculty member as well as a member of the professional staff in Residence Life. I also told him that housing was encouraging the project and student research in general. Still he seemed unsatisfied and asked whether I was being paid for the study, I told him that he was not obligated to participate and could refuse if it made him uncomfortable to reflect on the topic. I held out my hand to receive his consent form but he pulled

back instantly, immediately ceased asking questions and read his consent form, again. I give all participants a second copy of the consent form for their records and they usually give them back, saying they would just throw it away; this RA kept his copy, requested a third and asked specifically whom my adviser was.

I do not know if this RA was just having a bad day or just uncomfortable with the nature of my study. Being a Black woman and receiving this type of response from a RA in Region B, which has a reputation for being culturally and ethnically diverse and is the exact location where I worked as an MA, was not surprise but peculiar. While this White male and I had this exchange, I noticed that the other RAs were watching intently. Those who initially began to read their consent forms stopped and waited to see whether this particular RA would participate in the study. I believe that this exchange is worthy to note considering the trends that appear within the survey data, as well as recognizing the impact of attitudes held by RAs. I cannot say that if this RA refused to participate his peers would have followed suite, but I can deduct that a negative attitude held regarding a social identity survey could be connected to a negative attitude regarding social justice programs.

As indicated in the side-by-side comparison, there is a tendency in Region B to be more willing program with MAs. Conversely, there is only a slight difference in frequency of social justice programming from Region A. This is a noteworthy distinction considering the staff members in Region B ranked their residents as more diverse, listed more social identities than that of Region A, as well as listed more locations where a multitude of culturally different individuals were likely to interact. An unexpected answer that surfaced during the survey was the frequency of the response “not often” when referring to social justice programming or MA collaboration. It is difficult to quantify this statement into

distinct categories and the utilization of a Likert scale would have made interpretation smoother. Despite this shortcoming, it is significant that RAs do not host social justice programs regularly. I inquired into the frequency of social justice programs for my interviews as well as how often one collaborates with an MA. The RA interviewed was from Region A, and when asked how often he programmed around diversity he responded, “Um, I can’t say that I’ve done any programs specifically targeting diversity. I am currently working on a program targeting poverty and that that would probably be the most diversity centered program that I have done this far. Um, (long pause). I’m trying to think, no I can’t recall a particular program that I worked on that was diversity centered”. He has been a semester and a half at this point, and was clearly flustered when he could not think of one program that he had hosted.

0When asked how often he collaborated with his MA his response was, “Um, I talk to him rather frequently and if he request help on a program I offer my help... but anytime he requests help on a program I am more than happy to help out. And I frequently ask him about things he’s doing. Uh, for instance he recently did a billboard about race since it was Black History Month. And I asked him a few things about the billboard, the bulletin board to kind of understand where he was coming from with that bulletin board.” This RA seemed very uncomfortable and I decided not to push this question any further. It was interesting that in the middle of answering this question, he remembered that he had hosted a social justice program stating, “Oh, that reminds me I worked on a study abroad program early last semester where we went to world market and bought uh, several different kinds of imported food from other cultures around the world. Like Jamaican soda and Swedish chocolates and things like that. We had people come in from the study abroad office to

come give information to our residents who were thinking about studying abroad in future semesters”. He was visibly relieved at remembering this, although I could not see any concrete relationship made to social identities or culture, besides food, based on his descriptions of the program. This occurrence is part of the problem. This RA simply had not thought to do a program on social identities. Although being unable to remember embarrassed him, his classification of what is acceptable for “cultural programming” is somewhat odd. The description of what is one of the necessary duties for the RA position according to the university website is:

1 “ Addressing the needs of underrepresented and special interest groups and works with paraprofessional and professional staff and campus resources to plan strategies to incorporate these students into the floor, hall, and university communities.

This is achieved through: Planning and implementing active/passive programs each semester.<sup>3”</sup>

0Although explicitly stated as one of the functions of the position, the data collected from the survey does not correspond with this objective unless framed within expectations.

Depending on what the hall’s RD deems an acceptable quota, RAs may be fulfilling this requirement and a small sample size does not reflect that effort. However, I do not think this is the case. Each survey contained an area where RA/MAs/RDs could write any comments that they had and when it came to social justice programming, the responses were sometimes alarming. One RA who identified himself as a Black male stated that he does not do social justice programming often because he, “tries to build community”. One response was that housing “stress diversity too much...not enough focus on developing social/professional skills with floor mates”. A third interesting response was “its difficult to get residents to come to their (MAs) programs unless the multiculturalism is hidden”.



1 It is unnerving that a RA, particularly a RA of color, would feel as though discussing issues of identity would fracture his small community. It is equally unnerving that an RA felt as though housing stresses diversity too much. In a globalized world, people, specifically American citizens, will have to be capable of interacting and celebrating a multitude of cultural identities. Basic 'tolerance' will no longer suffice. Stuart Hall posits that, "the notion that identity...could be told as two histories, one over here, one over there, never having spoken to one another...is simply not tenable any longer in an increasingly globalized world"<sup>5</sup>. Through social justice programming housing can break down resistance and barriers that may, if maintained through adulthood, can have devastating effects on their alumni.

The second and third comments of interest pertaining to diversity being stressed too much and the difficulty in getting residents to attend programs inspired the student survey. Based on the list developed by freshman and sophomore students, I asked other residents to identify what they would want out of a social justice program. The top three responses were that the program has a credible presenter, be voluntary, and have activities and resources for the participants. The emphases placed on these three responses were different than what I believed students would select. Many of the "successful" social justice programs listed by RAs dealt with stereotypes yet residents did not feel as though this was an essential element for them to attend a program. Bhabha states that the stereotype "produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed"<sup>1</sup>. Constantly repeating stereotypes and using the strategy of addressing them to attract an audience serves only to reproduce them. There are definitely times when stereotypes must be addressed but perhaps for the reasoning of programming, it should not be the principle topic of

discussion.

2The third response, that it is difficult to get residents to attend unless the social justice topic is hidden, is disproved by the survey but held as a successful strategy by a veteran MA who was formerly an RA and a current facilitator of the EOL dialogue course. When asked how to overcome the attendance obstacle he bluntly stated, "...you trick um! And I don't start out to do that; it's not my goal... My goal is to start where the residents already are and that kind of thing and try to push them in the direction like of say, if you care about the environment you should also care about how it effects people. And it affects people and oh by the way that's not equitable and this is why. That is a strategy that I think has worked." Another veteran RA disagreed with the 'hidden' strategy stating that she is always very honest and upfront about the topic of the program. She states, "I try to get my residents interested in the topic we are covering by creating a bulletin board for that month that incorporates the same things". Her use of the bulletin board as 'passive programming' is different from the method employed by some RAs. As revealed in the surveys, some RAs put up bulletin boards to discuss issues of social identity but these alone may not be enough considering they are easily and usually destroyed. A recommendation is that both approaches be used, a board along with a program to increase awareness. Topics can also be related to professional development, if that makes the host more comfortable, or issues that residents are already intrigued about, such as the environment.

The most important recommendation that I can develop is utilize the MA position more. The position was created because professionals in Residential Life realized the importance of teaching multicultural competence and predicted that a student could serve as a bridge between that goal and housing. Yet, the MAs are not as well known as the RAs and receive less support from their hall staff argued one MA. She continued, “I enjoy my hall staff and we get along. But some are more interested in programming with me opposed to others. Its bad that some RDs don’t require their hall staff to do any social justice programming. They say educational programming so they do nutrition or something. I feel that they should have to do programming with the MA. It not just important for the residents, its important for the staff to grow and mature. And since they have so much influence, you really do need them to be with you about social justice issues”. Table 1 illustrates that students would rather attend a program about social identity by their RA (25%) over an MA (>1%). By collaborating, these numbers can improve significantly.

Additionally, students felt that a credible presenter was a key component to get them to attend a social justice program. Perhaps if RAs and MAs informed their students on the extensive training that they received regarding multiculturalism, residents would be more likely to see them as ‘credible’ once they decide to host a program. This would mean that paraprofessional staff would have had to been attentive and engaged during their training class and as stated by an MA, “with some RAs you see them getting it and really understanding the concepts but with the more quiet one you sit there wondering if they think all of this is crap and it really makes you wonder”. Just as it is important for housing to have staff members who reflect the diversity of the students, I understand that it is equally important for housing to have staff members who relate to more ‘traditional’ students as well. This quandary must be reconciled as Residential Life cannot boast how well trained their staffs are in multiculturalism if over 50% collaborate with MAs only 0-1 times a semester and over 36% host social justice programs “not often” (see side by side comparison).

When presented with this problem, a facilitator of the class, who went from being an RA to an MA stated, “As a facilitator, I would say that here is something that applies to this right now. I’m going connect it to something that they care about. Hopefully they care about something. If they want to be a good RA, I would say ‘I get that but here is why you have to think about these or talk about these because this is what happens, if you want to be a good RA, you have to consider this’. And it works; you kind of have to start backwards. And that would be my solution for that. I would imagine if the yare continuously presented with SJ concepts and by the end of class you put together your plan of what you want to do specifically. But for that kind of person you may have to reverse it or mix it all together”. Another veteran RA stated, “Everyone on staff should be committed to social justice programming and advertising them for what they are”. Personalities play a key role in who is selected to become an RA and MA. Residential Life must set specific goals in regard to social justice programming and those expectations must be made clear regardless of the personalities selected to become a part of the paraprofessional staff.

## **Conclusions**

This essay has explored the concept of Third Space, as it is applicable to housing. By being confronted with the Other, interrogating identity, and facilitating transformation through the use of cultural hybrids or MAs, housing serves as the site for these processes to take place. Due to time constraints, I was unable to attend many of the locations identified by staff where students interact across cultures. However, while conducting this study, I observed the Third Space once, and a member of housing staff did not facilitate it. The great possibility that housing holds is that as an entity, it facilitates these spaces automatically, intentionally or not. By having offices within the LLCs, gathering places for ethnic clubs, and classrooms within a living space, discussions and transformations are taking place all of the time. However, housing can create so many more of these spaces by simply hosting social justice programs, setting realistic and measurable goals for their staff in regards to their frequency, and supporting the amazing team of Multicultural Advocates that they already have at their disposal. One RD emphasized, “The MA position is not utilized nearly enough. Nor do I think that their role is communicated effectively to the students”. The MA is the key to the sustained Third Space within housing. “It is useful {the theory of Third Space} and can be applied in all those cases in which a dominant definition of identity is challenged by another one, one of those that cannot be ignored anymore”<sup>2</sup>. Intentionally facilitating the Third Space can give a voice to student’s identities that still go unheard and allow housing to fulfill its motto of allowing everyone resident to feel “at home at Illinois”.



<sup>2</sup> Ikes and Wagner. Communicating in the Third Space. Summary. Routledge, 2009, p 22

<sup>4</sup> Neville, Tynes, and Utsey. Handbook of African American Psychology. Ch22. Sage publications. 2009.

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<sup>5</sup> Les Black and John Solomos. Theories of Race and Racism in Sociology: A Reader. Ch. 11,p 147.Routledge Readers 2000. P 142,

<sup>6</sup> Meredith, Paul. Hybridity and the Third Space: Rethinking Bi-cultural Politics in Aotearoa/New Zeland. 1998.

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<sup>7</sup> Rutherford, Jonathan. The Third Space. An Interview with Homi Bhabha. P.219. 1990

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